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SUBJECT: NIGER: UNITED NATIONS (UN) SECRETARY GENERAL  
SPECIAL ADVISOR (SA) JAN EGELAND JUNE 2008 VISIT TO LAKE  
CHAD

REF: A. 06 NIAMEY 1190 (NOTAL)  
[B](#). 06 NIAMEY 1192 (NOTAL)  
[C](#). 06 NIAMEY 1203 (NOTAL)  
[D](#). NIAMEY 481 (NOTAL)

[1](#)1. Summary. UN Secretary General SA on Conflict Prevention, Jan Egeland, made a June 5-6 visit to Niger to investigate the nexus between climate change issues and conflict. UN Development Program (UNDP) Senior Representative Khardiata Lo N'Diaye (concurrently the senior UN system official in Niger) and SA Egeland called on Ambassador Allen to discuss conflict issues in Niger and to outline his goals for the two-day visit. With the aid of the UN system team, he conducted an information session on climate change issues in Niger for the diplomatic corps. He invited UN member state ambassadors to accompany him by UN plane on a day trip to the basin of Lake Chad, located in the easternmost part of Niger (the region of Diffa). Egeland pledged to appeal to the international community for funds to support efforts to replenish Lake Chad in Niger and said he'd share accounts of the visit at the climate change conference scheduled to take place in Copenhagen in 2009. End summary.

[1](#)2. SA Egeland emphasized that the purpose of his visit to Niger and the subregion was to obtain a firsthand account of climate change issues that potentially lead to conflict. He met several Government of Niger (GON) officials, notably Nigerien President Mamadou Tandja and the GON Minister of Environment (M/E) Mohamed Akotey, and stated that Tandja emphasized in the security discussion concerns about banditry, drugs and arms trafficking in the region. Egeland stated that there was mention of a possible regional security conference in July, that the venue and participating countries were still to be determined.

[1](#)3. In Egeland's call on the Ambassador, he inquired about the insecurity in northern Niger, as well as conflicts between pastoralists and agriculturalists over scarce water resources. Ambassador provided a brief overview of the situation in the north, stressing that U.S. Embassy personnel had not visited the conflict zone, that we receive periodic reports from partners who work in the north as they pass through Niamey. With regard to water conflicts, Ambassador cited the 2006 case (ref A, B and C) surrounding the Mohamid Arabs as one of the most extreme cases during her tenure in Niger. She said a dispute over the use of a watering hole led the GON Minister of Interior to issue an order to expel nomadic Mohamid Arabs based on a complaint from agriculturalists in Diffa that the herders' large camel

troops were sucking the watering holes dry. The diplomatic community had grave concerns about a potential refugee crisis, but the GON averted the problem by subsequently rescinding the expulsion order. Ambassador added that in 2007 there were occasional reports of incidents around watering holes, but generally last year's rains proved sufficient to prevent major hostilities over water.

¶4. The Lake Chad basin visit some 1000 kilometers from Niamey required 10 hours of travel -- 6 hours roundtrip by plane from Niamey to Diffa and 4 hours round trip by road from Diffa to three locales (Bosso, Mamouri, Boulatoungour) that border the now dry basin. Egeland and a delegation that included GON M/E, several ambassadors (USA, France, Germany, Egypt, Denmark Cooperative Senior Representative) and UN System partners (UNICEF, UNDP, FAO, WFP, etc.) found a dry bed of seashells in the basin -- not a drop of water was found during the entire visit. Villagers who in past decades earned livelihoods from fishing the lake informed the delegation that as the lake dried up in the 1970s they converted from fishing to herding crossbred Kouri cows to feed their families. The delegation was shown several Nigerien coast guard vessels with markings dating from the 1930's that, according to villagers, have been beached since 1973, the last year the Nigerien coast guard patrolled the lake surface that extended from Niger to Nigeria.

¶5. During the visit with Diffa officials, Egeland mentioned reports of dam projects in neighboring countries (citing Cameroon as an example) believed to have cut off a vital water supply to Lake Chad. He highlighted the Lake Chad

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Basin Commission's interest in pursuing a proposal to bring water from the Congo to the River Chari with aspirations that such a project would restore the lake to its past grand scale. Egeland stated he will launch an appeal to UN member states to fund research and development of Lake Chad. He pledged to share in his climate change engagements, including the climate change conference scheduled to take place in Copenhagen in 2009, his observations of the dire situation of populations that rely on the lake for survival.

¶6. Comment: The Lake Chad Basin Commission and the Niger River Basin Authority (reftel D) both place Niger in the center of the water dialogue. Some Nigeriens who once counted on Lake Chad or continue to rely on the Niger River to earn income now eke out an existence by herding livestock or relocating to cities to search for employment. Niger and its people, as well as populations across the Sahel who live along both basins, stand to benefit from research and development of water projects to replenish Lake Chad and/or enhance the Niger River. Both organizations now urgently compete for assistance from the same donor partners to deliver water resources critical to the survival of the basins' bordering populations. End comment.

ALLEN